**Media release**

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# Blind community calls for audio description service trial on the ABC

Blindness and consumer groups are calling on the Government and the ABC to begin an audio description service trial to give Australians who are blind or vision impaired greater access to television while the ABC resolves technical issues.

[Audio description](http://www.audiodescription.com.au/about-audio-description) (AD), a narration that describes visual elements of a program for people who are blind or vision impaired was trialled last year on ABC1 in order to assess the technical challenges of delivering the service in Australia.

While the ABC delivered its report on the trial to the Government for review at the end of 2012, groups campaigning for the service are still awaiting discussions to help address the issues in delivering AD, as promised by Communications Minister, Senator Stephen Conroy last year.

Blind Citizens Australia, Vision Australia, ACCAN and Media Access Australia, who are leading the campaign, say the best way to achieve a permanent service is through an ongoing service trial.

“We realise there may be issues that still need to be resolved without the strict legal requirements of regulation. An ongoing service trial would allow for those issues to be addressed in a working broadcast environment where true operational conditions would properly test solutions,” said Wayne Hawkins, Disability Policy Advisor at ACCAN who is legally blind.

“The ABC has been extraordinary in its commitment to viewers who are Deaf or hearing impaired through captioning. We feel that it’s now our turn to share in our ABC,” said Hawkins.

Campaigners are calling for 14 hours per week of audio described content – the same level as the initial trial – and are keen for it to begin this year.

The Minister acknowledged the overwhelming support for AD in a media release last year, saying, “It’s clear that audio description is a service that is strongly desired by the vision-impaired community, and the trial was embraced with real enthusiasm by participants.”

He stated that, “The audio description trial [was] an important first step on the pathway to establishing a permanent audio description service on Australian television.”

How the service is funded and delivered is a matter for the ABC, which is currently negotiating its priorities as part of the triennial funding process.

**ENDS**

To support the call for an ongoing service trial, send an email or letter to Senator Conroy, and the ABC’s Managing Director, Mark Scott, and [follow the campaign on Twitter](https://twitter.com/ADonTV) via @ADonTV.

## Media enquiries

Wayne Hawkins and Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Graeme Innes are available for interviews.

## **Contact:** Mark Callender (ACCAN) **M:** 0409 966 931 **E:** media@accan.org.au

## Background

### About audio description

Audio description (AD) is a form of narration which allows people who are blind or vision impaired to enjoy television. Delivered during gaps in dialogue, it describes actions, settings, costumes and other visual cues that are important to understanding what is occurring on screen. Without it, people are left to guess, or rely on family and friends to fill them in.

There are approximately 600,000 people in Australia who are blind, vision impaired or can benefit from using AD (H. Taylor, J. Keeffe, H. Vu, J. Wang, E. Rochtchina, P. Mitchell and M. Pezzullo 2005, ‘[Vision Loss in Australia](https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2005/182/11/vision-loss-australia)’, Medical Journal of Australia, vol. 182 no.11, pp. 565-568). AD has also been found to benefit people with an autism spectrum disorder (Garman, J. 2011, ‘[Autism spectrum, captions and audio description](http://mindfulresearch.co.uk/2011/08/29/autistic-spectrum-captions-and-audio-description/)’, Mindful Research).

### About the AD trial

In August 2012, the ABC commenced [a 13-week technical trial of AD on ABC TV](http://www.abc.net.au/tv/connect/audio_description.htm). The aim was to assess the technical challenges of delivering AD in Australia.

The ABC issued a report to the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (DBCDE) at the end of 2012 about the technical possibility of delivering a permanent AD service. This report has not yet been made public.

In a [media release](http://www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/media/media_releases/2012/173) last year, Senator Conroy said, “The Government will carefully consider the ABC’s report and looks forward to working cooperatively with all parties to address the issues raised.”

### About the campaign

The campaign for audio description on TV is being led by Blind Citizens Australia, Vision Australia, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) and Media Access Australia.

In October 2012, the campaign encouraged people to send postcards to Mark Scott and Senator Stephen Conroy, requesting the trial AD service continue beyond the trial. The support was overwhelming, with over 30,000 postcards distributed around Australia and 62 organisations supporting the campaign.

After the trial, campaign organisations also published a blindness sector report highlighting the consumer experience of the AD trial and informing Government’s thinking regarding the introduction of a permanent AD service.

### About Wayne Hawkins

Wayne Hawkins is a disability advocate who works for ACCAN. Wayne is legally blind after losing his eyesight in 2005 as an adult due to retinitus pigmentosa. He is dedicated to issues concerning people with disability, especially in relation to accessibility for television, cinema and other media. Wayne recently returned to Australia after living in New York for 26 years and worked with Blind Citizens Australia before joining ACCAN in 2010.